

7. Growing and Maintaining Jail Support:

As you spend time at your local jail, you'll get an idea of swells and lulls in processing, corresponding to the number of people released. If you have limited time, you might concentrate your presence at these times. Late-night and early-morning jail support, for those who can sustainably do it, is particularly important. Some people prefer groups that are more formally structured and can coordinate schedules in a more consistent way, while others keep a looser framework of communication between organic relationships that share what they have and show up when they can. If people disagree, there's nothing stopping you from supporting each other while you work your own way. In fact, having diverse groups can help jail support be more resilient overall. However you organize yourself, flexibility is a critical part of keeping jail support going. Whatever the issue, commit early on to conflict resolution processes in order to maintain the work, and build a safer, more resilient community.



7 STEPS

To Starting Your Own Jail Support Network Where You Live



FROM PDX JAIL SUPPORT AND SABOT MEDIA

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1. Get a lay of the land:

Find out where the jail(s) in your area are. Where are people processed after arrest? Is there a good spot to wait near the entrance, or across the street? Where are people's possessions sent to when they're detained? What is the phone number or website to find out about someone's status? Learning about de-escalation skills and trauma-informed care is important when supporting people who have just experienced carceral violence.



6. Spread the word:

Talk to passerby who look curious and let other networks know what jail support is and that it's happening in your city/town. Let them know how they can support you, and invite them to tag along to try it out themselves. Use social media where appropriate, flyer the area in and around the jails, and even consider making cold calls and stopping by local businesses and grocers. Many people in the working class experience or know someone who has experienced the carceral system, and would generally be motivated to support you and your work.



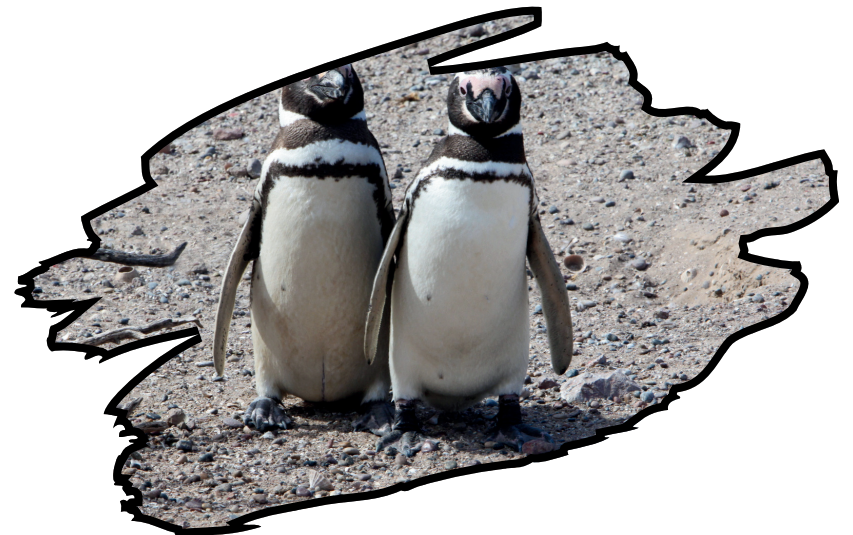
5. Dealing With Cops:

Police will likely try to talk to you and establish a rapport. As abolitionists, we encourage people to make it clear that we are not attempting to improve or make kinder the process of getting arrested - we believe the best thing they can do is to quit their jobs instead of arresting people in the first place. You can spend your time by the jail antagonizing cops to make their job more unpleasant, or simply ignore their presence, which has its own satisfaction. Keep in mind that the more hostile your interactions with police, the more retaliation you're likely to receive. Make an intentional decision with those involved for how you want to engage, or not, with police. It's important to remember that everything you're doing is being recorded by police cameras.



2. Find some people to do it with:

We recommend having at least one buddy when you're doing jail support, in case multiple people get released in succession or an unsafe situation develops. However many people you have, decide your capacity for the amount of time you're out and supplies you can offer. Even if you can only spend time at the jail a couple hours a week, that time is for incredibly valuable for anyone who happens to get released at that time.



3. Actually get started:

Pick a day and time, and prepare for the weather, and figure out how you're getting your supplies to the jail. Having multiple shifts in a row can allow people with less mobility to show up without having to transport supplies. You can either set up a display with a sign or have things contained in a backpack if you want to be less conspicuous. When people walk out of the jail, get their attention by asking how they're doing or offering something you have. Be friendly and open minded as you get to know your community.



4. Managing your discomfort:

The people you meet being released from jail have just experienced unjust treatment and social isolation. Some people aren't grounded in reality or will act in socially stigmatized ways. It's fine to feel uncomfortable during your interactions, and it's good to expand your comfort zone with people who might say something crass, shocking, or from your perspective, unreal. However, if someone says something harmful or targeted at you, draw a boundary and tell them it won't be accepted in the jail support space - just like you would with any member of your community. This is when trauma-informed care and de-escalation are critical. Regardless of appearance, give everyone the chance to get their needs met and transition out of jail.

